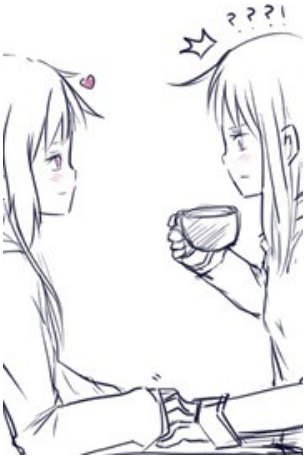

10 steps

By: rumiberri

for building a successful relationship. (10 steps as I slowly fall in love) [AU] [No magic]

Rated: Fiction T - English - Romance/Humor - [Madoka K., Homura A.] - Words: 7,599 - Reviews: 12 - Favs: 18 - Follows: 3 - Published: Mar 28 - id: 10222663

Step 1: Make an impact. First impressions are important

'Listen, Madoka, sometimes you have to deliberately go out to find something new. You may not know what you're missing until you veer away from your usual routine. So, when you're there, I want you to move away from the things you're comfortable with, and do something you normally wouldn't do. You're at the perfect age where you're still learning about life. So go out there, and experience things, and then tell me all about it when you visit, alright?'

Following her mother's advice, she is now taking a different path towards campus from her apartment, and the quaint coffee shop tucked away in the middle of two department stores immediately catches her eye. Knowing she still has a good amount of time until classes start, she decides that today she will finally take the plunge and try out this place, all by herself.

With a deep breath to calm her nerves, she pushes open the glass door. A very old-fashioned bell hanging by the entrance greets her as she steps into the earthly toned shop. Looking around, she finds the decorations inside are muted, far from the more modern day coffee shops that she is used to. The paintings hanging on the walls in particular make her smile: brown framed pictures of various coffee drinks.

"Welcome!" a friendly voice calls to her.

She enters completely, letting the door swing close after her.

"Uhm, good afternoon," she quietly says to the barista behind the counter.

He gives a nod and smile, before turning back to his job.

The scent of coffee is strong in the air as she steps further in, immediately noticing that the shop is empty except for her and the one employee. She turns, eyes searching for the usual screen most restaurants use for their menus, blinking when she cannot find one.

"Is it your first time here?"

The sudden voice makes her jump.

She turns back to the barista and nods. "Uhm.. Y-Yes..."

"It's more vintage here," he tells her with a smile. He points behind him to where there is a black painted wall with coloured words on it. "Chalk and blackboard paint."

"A-Ah." She realizes that the wall she had glossed over had actually been the menu; it makes sense since she now notices the drink names and prices. "T-Thank you." She returns his smile with her own.

"Just tell me when you're ready."

"Okay... thank you again."

They both return to their own tasks where her eyes automatically zero in on the hot chocolate she sees on the written on the board. That is the opposite of what she's trying to do however, and continues to search for something else. It takes her a few minutes, and when she's decided, she steps closer to the cash register. The barista looks up just as she's about to call out to him.

"Have you decided?" he asks her, wiping his hands on his black apron before he approaches the register.

"Yes. Uhm, one hot cappucino. For here," she tells him. As she reaches into her bag for her phone, she pauses, face suddenly unsure. "Oh, uhm, do you take credits?" she asks as he punches in her order.

He grins. "Yes, we're not *that* old fashioned."

She smiles lightly at him.

"That'll be 621yen."

She nods, phone now out and holds the screen to the scanner. There's a light beep as it automatically withdraws the needed amount.

"Please take a seat. I will bring it to you when your order is ready."

"Thank you," she murmurs, pocketing her phone.

Following his instructions, she heads over to one of the small booths located across the room and sits down. Her eyes rove around curiously as she takes a closer look at the small shop.

There are three more booths lining the walls, three small round tables fit for two in the area in between the booths and register, and not much else. Wooden floors, large circular lights hanging from the ceiling, and not a single projection screen or hologram in sight.

Very simple.

She wonders if this is how things used to be, before everything had gotten so *new*.

Her attention is drawn towards the painting closest to her on the wall, eyes looking over the small details of colour splashed onto the coffee beans to make them seem more vivid.

A clatter and she realizes that she has spaced out when there's a cup suddenly placed in front of her.

"Here you go, miss," the barista tells her, bowing lightly.

"T-Thank you."

"Be careful, it's hot," he reminds her and heads back to his station.

She smiles, acknowledging his warning. She reaches out and grabs the cup by the handle, pulling it towards her. There's a picture of a bear made out of the steamed foam, and it's cute enough that she takes out her phone to take a picture.

Just as the flash goes off, there's a familiar ring, and she quickly looks up to see who has joined them.

In walks a lithe young woman, maybe the same age as her, dressed in casual clothes: black slacks, a white collared shirt covered by a grey coloured knit sweater. As the door closes behind her, each step of her black dress boots are followed by the sound of a hollow tap, until she stops right in the front counter. Now, with a clear view of her backside, Madoka takes note that her dark black hair is long—longer than her own—reaching almost to her waist, and it's somehow strangely split in the middle.

"Welcome, Akemi-san. The usual today?" the barista greets the new customer warmly.

"Yes, please. Thank you." Her quiet voice seems to fit the atmosphere almost perfectly, as if they both exist during the same time period.

Madoka suddenly finds lavender eyes locking with her own. With a start, she realizes that she has been staring. Her cheeks flush and she quickly turns back to her cup of cappucino. Fingers loop through the handle and she brings the cup close to her mouth; a hurried sip to occupy her attention on other things.

She immediately feels the burn on her tongue and lips as soon as they contact the hot liquid through the deceptively cool foam. Her reaction is automatic, reflexive. The cup clatters loudly onto the table, where she proceeds to spill half her drink with a few splatters landing on her fingers. The coffee continues to trail down the edge, dripping, and she bangs her knee hard on the underside of the table when the hot liquid hits her exposed legs.

"Ouch!"

"Oh no, miss! Are you alright?" the barista quickly rushes over to her, grabbing napkins along the way to help sop up the mess.

Her cheeks flush and she's not sure which hurts more: her tongue, her legs, or her pride.

As the barista helps her clean up, she can't help but glance over to the other occupant in the room who is now watching her with mild amusement. Their eyes lock once more. When she sees the stranger's mouth twitch into a small smile, she bows her head in embarrassment and decides that her pride definitely hurts the most.

Step 2: Introduce yourself.

When she returns from the bathroom after unsuccessfully trying to clean out the stain from her sweater and shorts, she arrives just in time to hear the sound of bells. Pink eyes quickly dart to the exit, and she barely manages to catch a glimpse of dark hair before the door shuts close.

The mysterious stranger is now gone.

She sighs, lamenting on how the day had started off so good, and suddenly has turned so bad.

What else can go wrong?

As if sensing the answer, she glances at the watch on her wrist. Her eyes widen when she realizes she's going to be late.

She quickly turns to the barista. "Thank you for earlier and sorry for the mess. Uhm, I think I'll be back again."

He smiles at her. "It was no problem, glad to see you didn't hurt yourself too much. Thank you again. I look forward to seeing you here once more."

She waves at him before rushing out the door. The bell jingles after her as she clutches her bag tightly, set on a dead run to campus to try and make it to her class on time.

Step 3: Find something in common

It takes her two weeks until she finally builds up the confidence to return to the coffee shop. When she enters, she notices that most of the tables are occupied. Well, it's not that she doesn't understand, it's

a Friday night after all, compared to the mid week afternoon when she had first visited.

"Welcome!" a different barista this time, female, greets her.

She nods in acknowledgement before stepping inside to line up.

Three people are in front of her and she turns to the menu to decide on a different drink this time. Considering the number of people in the shop, she decides that she'll order this drink to go and enjoy it on the way home.

The line continues to grow and as she debates between two choices, she soon finds herself at the front without a set decision and quickly panics.

"U-Uhm," she glances behind her. There are four people waiting their turn and she latches onto the first of her choices. "White chocolate mocha, to go, please."

The barista nods and she hurriedly places her phone to scan the credits. There's the beep as the register accepts it, and a receipt is then slid her way.

"Sorry, we're kind of backed up today so it'll take around ten minutes. Can I have your name?"

"A-Ah, uhm... M-Madoka," she stammers out.

"Madoka-san. Thank you. We will call you when it is ready." The barista gestures down the counter to where there are a few people milling about. "You will pick up over there. Thank you again."

"Thank you," she murmurs. She takes her receipt with her as she walks to the back.

The coffee shop is louder today, filled with people that range from college students to a slightly older couple. She finds her evaluation of this place being not so popular had been incorrect; the sound of bells still ringing confirms that. A glance over to the door and she sees that the line is still there, and seems to be growing as more customers flood in.

The coffee here is good though, from what she can remember of the little she had managed not to spill.

With nothing else to do as she waits, she finds an empty spot against the back wall and takes out her phone to check her messages. There are a few texts sent from her best friend back at home, and seeing the familiar name makes her smile. Her eyes scan the contents before she sends out a quick reply and soon, she finds herself caught up in their conversation.

More orders are called, and she is in the midst of laughing quietly at her friend's joke when she finally hears her name.

Her head snaps up and she quickly stuffs her phone back into her bag. She pushes past a few customers to reach the counter.

"Madoka-san? An order for Madoka-san?" a second barista holds up her cup and she waves at him.

"Uhm, yes, that's me. Madoka," she tells him.

He gives her a friendly smile, placing the lidded cup in front of her. "Please enjoy. Have a nice day."

She nods. "Thank you. You too."

She notices there's already a cup sleeve slipped onto her drink, and quickly picks it up before turning around to make her way out of the shop. To her surprise, she finds her path blocked by other waiting customers and that the coffee shop is now packed. She starts pushing past them, squeezing in between open spaces while muttering out apologies as she accidentally elbows someone on her way to the door.

Just as she's about to reach the exit, her bag snags on something and she struggles to pull it free. She tugs on it, feeling it give way slightly, prompting her to pull even harder.

The resistance disappears and her bag is suddenly loose, flying forward and she with it. She trips over her own feet and stumbles just as the door opens and the bell rings. There's a brief moment of horror as she realizes what's about to happen, before the new customer in the shop is greeted with a pink blur and a hot splash of coffee on their shirt front.

They crash to the ground, bodies halfway out the door with Madoka landing on top of the unfortunate victim who hisses at the burning liquid.

"Oh my gosh, I'm so sorry!" Madoka apologizes as she scrambles off. She can feel the hot coffee soak through her own thin sweater and can't imagine how it must feel on the other person.

She hears a quiet sigh as other customers murmur around them.

"...I did want a White chocolate mocha to go, but this is ridiculous."

She immediately recognizes the voice and her eyes widen as the same mysterious stranger from two weeks ago sits up painfully.

"Are you two alright?" one of the baristas rushes towards them, napkins in hand after being informed that one of their customers had taken a spill up front.

"Uhm, yes... I mean..." Madoka stammers out.

Lavender eyes blink at her before the recognition sets in. "...You again. Why am I not surprised...?"

Step 4: Don't come on too strong, no one likes being overwhelmed

Cleanup is brief as the three of them wipe up the spilled drink as best as they can. Once that is done, the worker returns to the register, leaving Madoka to stare at the stranger that now bares the same identical stain as her on her shirt.

"I'm really sorry," Madoka repeats once more, bowing her head.

Another sigh. "Please stop apologizing already. It's fine." The stranger moves to enter the shop when a hand around her wrist stops her.

"L-Let me make it up to you! I'll buy you a drink!" Madoka pleads tearfully.

Her honest and earnest pink eyes surprise the young woman and she steps back slightly.

"Uhm. That's alright. It was an accident," she mumbles, gently shaking her hand free. "Plus, you never seem to get to drink your own drink... Just spend that money buying yourself another one..."

"W-Wait!" Madoka grabs her sleeve this time and the stranger stares at her almost fearfully. Noticing her trepidation, she lets go and offers her a smile. "I mean... a-at least let me... uhm... pay for cleaning your shirt?" she gestures to the large stain. "T-There's a laundromat nearby... and uhm... if you wait too long the stain will set..."

The young woman's lips quirk up slightly, already knowing how she knows that. "That is alright. The gesture is enough."

The rejection has Madoka bowing her head in obvious disappointment. There's a pause, a sigh, and a hand is suddenly on her arm. She looks up to see lavender eyes staring at her.

Those eyes glance to the busy coffee shop briefly, and turns back to her, head tilted in inquiry.

Step 5: Don't move too fast.

"Actually, I live quite close to here. Would you like to come over? You can wash your sweater before the coffee sets in."

Madoka blinks at the offer, face looking unsure.

"I have a roommate, if you're worried about that. She'll be home."

"Ah," Madoka waves her hands around. "N-No. T-That's not what I was thinking. J-Just that... I'm supposed to be making it up to you...not the other way around..."

To her surprise, the stranger gives her a small smile. "Well, I already feel bad that this is the second drink you dropped. I suppose...if you would come and share a cup of hot cocoa with me, that will suffice."

"Eh?" Madoka stares at her in confusion. "Uhm... But..."

Sensing this will continue endlessly, she tries a different approach. "Well, I'm not sure about you, but I definitely like this shirt enough to return home right now to wash it. Don't worry about anything, I

forgive you. I hope you're able to enjoy a cup soon without spilling it. Their coffee is quite good," she tells her quietly as she turns away.

"I... uhm! W-Wait! I mean, it..."

Another look into those lavender eyes, and Madoka's reminded of her mother's advice.

She smiles. "Thank you. That sounds nice. Uhm. I'm Kaname Madoka. Y-You can call me Madoka."

"Akemi Homura. Homura is fine."

Step 6: Meet their friends. It tells you what kind of person they are.

Homura leads her to a small apartment complex just a few streets down. Once there, they climb up the stairs to reach the unit that she rents with two other students.

Considering their location, they aren't surprised to find out that they attend the same college, and that they haven't run into each other because they're in different departments. Madoka is studying medicine, hoping to look into nursing, while Homura is clear across campus in the Computer Science department.

"I usually avoid going home around this time," Homura tells her conversationally as she unlocks the door. "Sometimes my roommate is there with her boyfriend, and they like their 'private time.'"

"A-Ah," Madoka blushes at that. "W-Will it be okay then? I mean..."

Homura shakes her head, offering her a small smile. "No, we won't be walking in on them. Those two aren't here today. They're at a party."

"Oh, okay," Madoka sighs in relief.

Homura pushes open the door, giving her a view of the small apartment.

"Sorry it's a mess," Homura murmurs, obviously referring to the old couch that has random articles of clothing draped over it. "I tell them to clean up but neither of them listen..." Madoka can hear a bit of the

irritation layered in her voice. "Anyways, let me get you something to wear as our clothes wash. It'll be a bit big on you," her eyes evaluate Madoka's smaller and shorter frame, "I hope you don't mind."

Madoka blushes, suddenly feeling insecure and shakes her head. "N-No... that's fine, thank you, Homura-chan."

Homura nods, closing the door before she points to the kitchen. Madoka turns and she can see a small table with different chairs set around it.

"Those chairs are cleaner since they hardly go into the kitchen," Homura explains. "You can sit there and wait, if you'd like."

"Thank you," Madoka tells her, feeling shy. She watches as Homura heads to the hallway to their left, opens the first door and disappears inside.

Now by herself, Madoka looks around as she slowly walks to the kitchen. She notes that this apartment is definitely smaller than her own, especially considering three people live here and she is living by herself.

Compared to the living room that has scattered things thrown around, the kitchen is definitely a lot more cleaner. Lowering herself onto a foldable metal chair, she feels that she can definitely see traces of Homura's personality in here: boxes organized by size and no dirty dishes in the sink. For some reason, she has Homura pegged as being very organized, and can only assume the kitchen and her room are the only areas she has complete control of.

"Hey, Homura?"

Madoka sits up as a voice she doesn't recognize calls out into the kitchen. She turns to see a half naked young woman dressed in very short shorts, and a thin tank top plodding into the living room. Her long, dark blonde hair is tied in a messy ponytail and she yawns loudly, before her blue eyes open to stare at Madoka.

"You're not Homura."

Madoka shakes her head. "U-Uhm. N-No. I'm not..."

"I had no idea she had any friends. Learn something new everyday, eh?" the blonde comments to her as she enters the kitchen. She immediately walks towards the refrigerator and pulls it open.

Madoka nervously looks around, wondering if she should leave when Homura re-emerges, now wearing a clean shirt and with a grey sweater in her hand.

"Ma..doka..." Homura glances briefly at the blonde as she enters the kitchen. She then ignores her and holds the sweater out for Madoka to see. "Will this be alright?"

"Ah, y-yes, Homura-chan, that looks fine," She accepts it with a smile, even as her eyes glance around nervously between Homura and her roommate as she senses the tense atmosphere.

"The bathroom is the second door on the right," Homura nods to her and she quickly stands to change.

"O-Okay, I'll be right back...uhm..." Madoka looks to the blonde who raises an eyebrow at her. She averts her eyes, almost tripping over her chair in her haste to leave.

Homura easily catches her.

"Be more careful," she tells her, voice soft.

Madoka blushes. "T-Thanks, Homura-chan. Uhm. I-I'll go change..."

She makes sure to watch her steps as she heads to the bathroom.

Once she's inside, she can hear Homura and her roommate talking, no doubt about *her,* and closes the door to avoid overhearing things she probably doesn't want to hear. She quickly pulls off her sweater and stares down at her shirt, disappointed that the coffee had seeped through and there's a small stain on the front of that as well. She looks to the sweater Homura has given her and notes that it is thicker than her own. Homura probably knew her shirt would also need to be washed and had deliberately chosen something warmer.

It makes Madoka smile at her thoughtfulness.

She strips off her shirt, making sure there's no coffee on her skin, before she slips on Homura's sweater. It smells nice, like flowers, and though it is a bit long on her, she finds it's not too baggy and likes how soft it feels.

She quickly folds her dirtied shirt and sweater and leaves the bathroom. When she enters the living room, she finds that Homura's roommate is no longer there, most likely in her room, and Homura is now rummaging through the shelves in the kitchen.

As soon as she hears footsteps though, she looks up and seems relieved when she spots Madoka.

"Not too big," Homura comments.

Madoka glances down to herself and then to the sleeves that cover her hands. She smiles.

"It's really comfortable," Madoka tells her. "I'm tempted to keep this for myself."

Homura eyes her and she looks away.

"Uhm... I mean... that is..."

"If you like it, you can have it."

Madoka's eyes widen and she turns back to Homura. "E-Eh?"

Homura nods to her before returning to the shelves and pulls out a box of pasta. "I have three more sweaters that are exactly the same."

Madoka blinks and wonders if Homura is joking. She waits for the punchline, but when Homura starts removing some pans from another shelf without saying anything, she realizes that she's telling the truth.

"O-Oh, uhm. It's very comfortable... I can see why you'd want to have four of them..."

Homura glances at her, a small smile on her lips. "Relax. I only bought them because they were on sale. I don't normally buy four of the same exact sweater."

Still not used to Homura's humor, Madoka can only nod as she continues to watch Homura pull out more random things.

"Uhm... Homura-chan, what are you doing...?"

Homura merely gestures to the items now on the counter. "I hope you don't mind pasta for dinner."

"Eh? Dinner?" Wasn't it only an invite for hot cocoa?

Homura nods in confirmation. She sets the jar of pasta sauce down and walks away, signaling for Madoka to follow her. She grabs her stained shirt off the couch and leads her to the door.

"Yes, dinner. I assume you haven't eaten yet?" Homura asks as she locks the door after they exit.

"Oh, uhm. I was just going to buy something to eat afterwards..." Madoka replies as she follows her down the stairs.

"Pasta, and then hot cocoa for dessert."

"Even though you were going to get coffee before dinner...?" Madoka questions her quizzically.

Homura leads her further through the apartment complex and heads towards a glass door.

"I was going to have coffee with dinner, actually," she tells her as she pushes open the entrance to the laundry room.

There are five sets of washer and dryers, and the two closest to them are occupied. Madoka follows Homura to the one furthest back, watching as she pops open the door, throws her shirt inside, before she takes Madoka's clothes and throws those in as well.

"Uhm, I'll pay for this!" Madoka tells her, quickly pulling out her phone as Homura does the same.

"That's alright, Madoka, I—"

"Nope!" Madoka holds her phone to the scanner and the machine accepts her credits, beeping for them to select a cycle. "Especially if you're going to cook dinner!"

Homura stares at her briefly before she pushes the button for the normal cycle. She watches as the washing machine turns on, filling with water.

"So you will stay?" Homura asks her after a moment.

Madoka nods, smiling.

Homura suddenly sighs. "If you haven't noticed, I don't really get along with my roommates... Hopefully she will be more tolerable with someone else here. I apologize already for what rude things she may say to you..."

"I'm sure it'll be fine, Homura-chan. And I can help you with dinner! I'm pretty good in the kitchen."

This time Homura eyes her critically. "Are you sure? The kitchen is a dangerous place, Madoka. I'm not sure we will survive if you end up tripping over everything."

Madoka stares at her in shock. Did Homura just tease her?

The small smile she sees on her lips confirms this and Madoka reaches out to punch her lightly on the arm.

"...Ow."

"You deserved that!" Madoka tells her, feigning offense. "You're so mean, Homura-chan!" She harrumphs and crosses her arms across her chest, turning away.

"Ah..." Homura blinks. "Uhm. I apologize Madoka. I didn't mean to make you angry..."

Madoka turns back, immediately feeling bad when she notices how serious Homura looks. "N-No, I was just kidding. I'm not really offended or anything... my best friend at home used to call me Godoka because I used to trip over things so much."

"Godoka...?"

"A combination of Godzilla and Madoka," she explains with a sigh.

Homura covers her mouth with her hand to hide her smile, but the little bit Madoka had seen makes her want to see Homura smile more freely, more often.

She instead grins ruefully. "Luckily I'm not as bad as I used to be..."

Homura shakes her head, small smile still on her face as she lowers her hand. "I can't imagine how you used to be, except all I'm picturing now is you falling around, accidentally destroying buildings because you tripped over a tree."

Madoka punches her again but finds herself laughing as she pictures that image in her mind. "That does seem pretty funny though."

Homura nods, obviously still amused. She glances over to the machine to check the timer. "The laundry should be done by the time dinner is finished," she notes as she inputs an alarm into her phone. "Let's head back."

"Sure," Madoka tells her, following her as they exit the laundry room. "Uhm, Homura-chan?"

"Yes, Madoka?" she turns to her curiously.

"Thanks... for inviting me over. I haven't made many friends since I came to Tokyo, so it's nice to not be by myself for once..."

Homura stares at her and turns away. "...It's the opposite for me. I've lived here all my life without making any friends."

"Eh?" Madoka blinks. "I don't believe that Homura-chan... you're so..." she gestures as she tries to think of a fitting word.

"Strange? Cold? Stand-offish? Emotionless?"

Madoka looks at her, shaking her head. "...Cool... Mature... Pretty..." the last word slips from her mouth and her eyes widen before she blushes. "I-I mean, we're the same age but you seem so much, I don't

know, put together...?" she coughs into her hand, nervously looking away.

"...Madoka?"

"Y-Yes, Homura-chan?"

"Uhm... thanks."

She turns and catches a tinge of pink across Homura's cheeks. She finds herself unable to stop the grin that appears on her face.

"What are friends for, Homura-chan?"

"I'm not sure..."

"It was a rhetoric question, Homura-chan..."

Step 7: Have them meet your friends. They will notice things you may not see.

"I don't know Madoka, she sounds kind of weird."

Madoka sighs into her phone. "You haven't even met her, Sayaka-chan."

"Yeah, but from what I hear about her, she seems like a weirdo. An antisocial weirdo that's obviously hard to get along with. It's only because you're so nice you can't see how bad she is."

Madoka shifts from her position on her bed and reaches out to pull her blankets up. She snuggles against her pillow, closing her eyes before replying. "No, Homura-chan isn't a 'weirdo' at all, Sayaka-chan. She's very nice and considerate—"

"And cool and beautiful and smart," Sayaka finishes for her. "You know, if I didn't know any better I'd say you're in love with her, Madoka."

Madoka's eyes open suddenly and she sits up as she feels her whole body heat up. "W-What?! What are you talking about, Sayaka-chan! I-I dont—how—w-what!"

She hears Sayaka laugh. "Calm down already, geez. I said *if* I didn't know any better, which I do. Though, you seem to be denying it an awful lot... are you not telling me something, Madoka?"

Madoka places a hand to her face, trying to will her blush away and is glad that she had opted out of their usual video conference. "It's not like that, Sayaka-chan! It's just... Homura-chan's the first friend I made here, so—"

"Alright, that's it Madoka! I'm going to meet this 'Homura-chan' of yours and make sure she's good enough for you. I'm going to book tickets for this weekend so clear your schedule."

"E-Eh? W-Wait Sayaka-chan, what are you—"

"Anyways, I gotta go now. Club practice early morning. I'll send you information when I find out when my train gets there and when you should pick me up at the station. Ask your mom if she wants me to bring anything over and send me a text. Good night!"

"W-Wait, Sayaka-chan you—"

click

Madoka blinks in confusion as the ringtone echoes in her ear before she flops down heavily onto her bed.

"Ughhh... Sayaka-chan... you and your impulses!"

She sighs and stares at her phone screen, taking note of the little memo she had written a few days ago. She and Homura had planned to drop by one of the museums in the area this Saturday, but now it seems like she will need to entertain Sayaka instead...

She checks the time, knowing that Homura usually sleeps a bit later. She sends her a message, informing her of their cancelled plans and warning her about Sayaka's sudden visit.

A minute passes and her phone chimes with one unread message. She quickly opens it and Homura's reply has her smiling.

'Should I hide until she leaves? I know where there are some abandoned bomb shelters.'

Madoka sends out her own message.

'No, silly. You don't need to hide. I just wanted to warn you that she's curious about you and wants to meet you. Sayaka-chan is really nice and funny. I hope you two will get along.'

Homura takes a while longer with her reply this time.

'I see.'

Madoka frowns at the short message.

'What's wrong? Are you nervous? There's nothing to be worried about. Just be your usual self.'

Madoka finds herself falling asleep before the familiar chime sounds, and she blinks sleepily at the clock. Fifteen minutes have passed since she had last sent her message.

'Hiding in the shelter seems like a good idea actually.'

Madoka sighs and instead of typing out another message, opens up her phone book. She quickly thumbs to Homura's number before pressing the dial button.

The phone rings twice before she hears a click and a familiar quiet voice in greeting.

"...Hello?"

"Homura-chan. What's wrong?"

"Wait, let me go outside first..."

"Okay."

She can hear rustling in the background as Homura makes her way outside of her apartment, to where she can talk more freely without waking up her roommates.

"It's pretty cold out tonight," Homura comments quietly once she's in the clear.

"You should've grabbed a jacket," Madoka scolds her.

"It's alright."

Madoka sighs softly and switches the phone to her other ear. "Homura-chan... do you not want to meet Sayaka-chan?"

Homura remains quiet and Madoka waits patiently.

"...People tend to not like me very much, Madoka," she admits truthfully.

Madoka frowns even though she knows Homura can't see her. She glances outside her window, picturing her shivering under the night sky.

"Well, I like you, Homura-chan. And Sayaka-chan will like you too, if she knows what's good for her!"

"And if she doesn't...?"

"She will. She definitely will! Especially if she doesn't want the wrath of Godoka after her!"

"...Madoka?"

"Yeah, Homura-chan?"

"Thank you."

Madoka smiles to herself. "Go back inside, Homura-chan, before you catch a cold."

"Yes Ma'am."

Madoka grins. "That's right soldier! Get back inside and I'll see you tomorrow at the coffee shop?"

"Yes, at 3pm."

"3pm. Like always."

"Yes."

Madoka doesn't want to hang up but she knows it's getting late. "Alright, I better let you go so you can get back inside. Good night, Homura-chan."

"Goodnight, Madoka."

Madoka waits for the sound of the dial tone as her phone automatically disconnects. She stares at Homura's name on her screen before holding her phone close.

"Is Sayaka-chan right...?" she asks herself. "Do I really...?"

Step 8: Still here? Good. Don't mess it up by moving in together too soon. That is a big commitment and should be well thought out.

"Sorry I'm late, Madoka," Homura tells her as she deposits herself into the seat across from her. "Thank you for ordering for me even though it was my turn to pay this time. The next two are mine."

Madoka stares at her, noting how Homura seems a bit less put together today. "What's wrong?"

Homura blinks and finally looks up. Madoka can see how tired her face is. She waits, watching as Homura takes a sip of her coffee, relaxing at the familiar taste, before she sighs.

"I'm looking for a new place to live. My roommates are kicking me out."

Madoka's eyebrows rises in shock. "W-What? Why? They can do that?"

Homura shrugs, taking another gulp of her already cooling liquid. "We never really get along. Things have been building for a while, so it was inevitable. I was originally subletting for one of their friends, which is why it was so cheap, and they found someone else to take my place. I have about a week, probably less, until they start throwing my clothes out the window..."

Madoka frowns. "Will you be able to find another place with such short notice? And at the same price range..."

Another mouthful of coffee swallowed before Homura answers. "Well, if worse comes to worst, I can always stay at my relatives for a bit..."

Madoka's frown deepens. Homura hasn't spoken much about her family, but whenever they're brought up, it's nothing ever good. Afterwards, she always falls into these long periods of silence where she looks lost in painful memories.

Madoka bites her lip, debating briefly, but there's no way she's going to turn her back on Homura when she needs her.

"Move in with me."

Homura chokes on her last gulp of coffee, coughing loudly to try and expel the liquid from her windpipe.

Madoka stands, moves over to take a seat next to her before rubbing her back.

"Are you alright, Homura-chan?"

Homura nods weakly, coughing once more to clear her throat. "Y-Yeah. T-Thanks, Madoka. I'm okay now."

Madoka keeps her hand on her back and turns to face her. "I'm serious about you moving in, Homura-chan. If you have to even think about staying at your relatives, then it means you're definitely at a bad place. My apartment is big enough for the both of us..."

She can see that Homura is really considering it, alerting her with just how dire the situation is. She smiles at her.

"I know you'd at least insist in paying so how 'bout... you pay half of what you pay now at your apartment, since you won't even get your own room?"

Homura blinks. "N-No, that's too little, Madoka. Your apartment is bigger..."

Madoka stares at her. "I'm not even paying for it myself... my mom's renting it out for me. I'm only suggesting you pay since I know you would feel bad if you didn't, but I don't mind you staying there for free."

Homura shakes her head, eyes full of conflict as she considers her situation.

"Uhm. That is... uhm..."

"We already spend so much time together as it is," Madoka points out. "And you already have some of your stuff at my place since you sleepover so often to avoid your roommates..."

The offer is tempting, and staying so close to Madoka is even more tempting.

"Uhm," she looks to Madoka seriously. "...Only if your mom allows it. S-Since she's the one paying... I don't want to step over my boundaries and get you in trouble or anything... And maybe I can discuss the rent with her."

That catches Madoka off guard but she suddenly grins. "Actually, spring break is almost here and I was wondering what you were going to do... but I guess you'll be coming home with me when I visit my parents then."

Homura stares at her blankly.

"Mama always told me that negotiations should always be done face to face. If you go there to meet them, I know for sure Mama will agree. Anyways, since you're done with your coffee, we should get going and move out your stuff before your roommates do something with them." She quickly moves back to her original seat and finishes her own cup of coffee.

She places the cup down, smiling, and grabs her bag before standing once more. "Let's go, Homura-chan! Stop staring at me already."

Homura blinks, blushing lightly as she follows her example. Madoka links their arms together and turns to the barista.

"Bye Mike-san! We're leaving a bit early today. We'll see you tomorrow."

"See you, Madoka-san, Homura-san! Thanks for coming."

Madoka nods, waving at him and drags Homura out the door.

Step 9: Ready for commitment? Have them meet your parents, it's the first big step.

All throughout their train ride, Homura is a bundle of nerves, and it's the first time Madoka has really seen this side of her. She tucks away this precious memory as she finds herself learning more about Homura as the days pass.

"It's fine, Homura-chan, they'll like you," she tells her, placing her hand over her shaking ones. "Sayaka-chan liked you just fine!"

Mentioning Sayaka has Homura rolling her eyes, and Madoka grins as she thinks back to her best friend's visit a month ago. Sayaka had really dug in deep to try and expose Homura's 'secrets' or whatever she had said. All they had really found underneath her exterior was a shy, sensitive and insecure Homura that she had made them promise they would never, ever, mention *ever* again.

Of course, every time Madoka brings up Homura now in their conversations, Sayaka is always making fun of her, but she knows that's merely Sayaka's way of affection; she herself has been the victim of her teasing for years now.

"...I'm scared, Madoka," Homura admits and Madoka feels her heart drop as she leans close to hug her.

"Don't be, Homura-chan. My parents will definitely like you. How can they say no to this cute widdle face?" she teases her as she grabs her cheeks, pinching them.

"M-Madoka," Homura blushes, pulling away.

"You'll be fine, Homura-chan," Madoka tells her as she presses their foreheads together. "Just be yourself."

Homura gives her a hesitant nod and Madoka smiles at her and moves away.

The train announces that they will arrive in Mitakihara in 15 minutes, prompting Homura to tense once more.

This time, Madoka links their hands together and squeezes Homura's hand in reassurance.

"They'll like you. I know they will."

Step 10: Congratulations! This is just the beginning to your successful relationship!

"Madoka!"

She looks up when she hears her name called, and spots her family waving at her from the train platform.

"Mama! Papa! Takkun!" She grins at them, pulling her luggage along with her as her other hand remains around Homura's, making sure she will not run away the first chance she gets.

As soon as she's close enough, Madoka is engulfed by affectionate hugs that she tries her best to return with just one hand.

"Welcome home, Madoka!" Junko smiles at her daughter, placing her hands on her shoulders. "Look it you. You've grown into a beautiful young woman so fast."

Madoka blushes at the compliment and grins shyly.

"Tokyo has been good to you, hm?" Junko comments as she evaluates her daughter's appearance.

Madoka smiles, nodding.

"Now," Junko's eyes glint as her face warps into a grin. "Who is this mysterious beauty you are holding on to, oh so tightly?"

Madoka pulls Homura towards her, pulling harder when she feels her resisting.

"Homura-chan," she turns to her. "Come here and meet my parents."

Lavender eyes stare at her, and she can see the fear in them. She tugs her arm once more.

"Please, Homura-chan?"

Her gentle tone coaxes the reluctant Homura closer, and Junko grins at her.

"So this will be our future daughter in law, hm? Not bad, Madoka. Not bad at all."

Madoka's face turns as red as Homura's.

"M-Mama! T-That's not—!"

"Madoka. You send me a message telling me you want me to meet someone very special to you, and that you're coming home to ask me an important question. Are you telling me she's *not* going to ask for our permission to marry you?"

"Uhm," Madoka glances at Homura, then down to their still clasped hands. It is definitely too soon right now, but one day...

She notices the familiar grin on her mother's face, twinkling eyes showing that she's merely teasing. They both share a smile.

"...How did you figure it out?"

Homura's eyes widen and Junko grins, pulling the both of them towards her into a tight hug.

"Welcome, Homura. I've heard so much about you, you feel like family alread**y."**

Edited the last bit. So that the statement Junko says isn't as heavy with a bit more Homura. Also, **bolds** are always deliberate.

Actually, edited more because my grammar is wonky (alwaysss). o.o more editssss.

AN: Disclaimer: do not follow these steps. they aren't real. I made them up.

Reverse cat's cradle with hot cocoa replaced with coffee! Which, I realize is a bit unoriginal... but I tried to make it different and I just had to stick with a coffee shop + clumsy Madoka~

A tentative one-shot that may or may not be updated. In a future where there is no magic and everyone's just living their lives. They

are older, which accounts for their OOC? At least Homura's... and no, that blonde is not Mami.

Yay. Sequel is up: cautious steps